

The Corwell Family  
of Dyer's Delight  
In Sussex County On The Delaware

For

Charles R. Barefoot, Esquire

By

George Valentine Massey II

1959

### The Place of Settlement

Between latitude 37° and 39-1/2° north, and running almost due north and south at about 76° west longitude, is a fertile peninsula, its climate mild, with "soft, half-Syrian air." It is formed by the Delaware and Chesapeake Bays, the Delaware River and Atlantic Ocean. Here lies the greater part of the state of Delaware, about a third of Maryland, and two counties of Virginia.<sup>(1)</sup>

Colonists came early to this pleasant place, and in 1622 the Dutch established a trading post possibly at the site of Lewes, near the mouth of Delaware Bay. They did a good business in furs, and in 1631 the merchant-sailor David Pietersen De Vries settled a colony there and built a fort. But the settlers incurred the wrath of the Indians who annihilated them, and left no vestige of the fort.

Next came the Swedes and Finns in 1638, whose settlement at the site of Wilmington was the first permanent one on the Delaware. Their absorption of the river trade aroused the ire of fiery Peter Stuyvesant who, in 1651, captured the Swedish forts and secured from the Indians the land from Christiana Creek to Bombay Hook, an island on Delaware Bay.

To the south of Bombay Hook, extending to Cape Henlopen at the mouth of Delaware Bay, the territory was known as the Whorehill, but when William Penn acquired the area as part of Pennsylvania he named its two counties Kent and Sussex. The county seat of Sussex, to the south, was called Lewes.<sup>(2)</sup> This historic town with its abounding Broadkiln hundred, as the sub-divisions were known, was for generations the center of activity for the Conwells.

Before the arrival of Yeates Conwell in 1699, who founded the family in Sussex, one Francis Cornwall (d.1691) settled there and held office. Because of a possible confusion between these surnames a brief account of Francis Cornwall is included.

Francis Cornwall, The High Sheriff

Francis Cornwall (d.1691) and his wife Mary were evidently Quakers from Ulster, Ireland, from where a communication came to the Philadelphia Meeting concerning them shortly before the 3rd of the 2nd month 1687.<sup>(3)</sup> The details of this letter are not given. Shortly after his arrival Francis Cornwall was commissioned a justice of the courts in 1686, and the year following was elected to the important office of high sheriff. His behavior was not popular for he was suspended as a justice, and in 1688 was ordered to account to the Governor and Council for failing to "return" Luke Watson whom the freeholders had chosen for the Governor's Council.<sup>(4)</sup> When the Philadelphia Meeting was advised, the following was recorded the 25th of the 3rd month 1688: "This day two papers, one from Francis Cornwall, and the other subscribed by Thomas Wynne & William Clark concerning the aforesaid Cornwall was [sic] read and not well approved." In the end Cornwall "returned" Watson. What his motive was in delaying the appointment is hard to say - unless he shared the antipathy for Luke Watson which the former presiding justice, Captain John Avery, held and so frankly expressed when he called him a beggarly rogue and thief, and defied him to sue for the remark.<sup>(5)</sup>

Francis Cornwall died intestate in Sussex County shortly before the 12th of the 9th month 1691 when his widow Mary was granted letters of administration on his estate.<sup>(6)</sup> She appeared in court with her new husband, Josias Wescoat, September 6, 1693, concerning the Cornwall estate.<sup>(7)</sup> The final settlement was made in 1709 and "forthwith Devided between ye two Heires, Francis and Mary, by a Jury of twelve men & Captn Pemberton Surveyor...." Mary Cornwall, the daughter, was married at the time to Rice Wolfe.<sup>(8)</sup> It is evident that Yeates Conwell was not an heir.<sup>(9)</sup>

Yeates Conwell of Broadkilm Neck

The arrival of Yeates Conwell (d.bef.Mar.24,1727) and his wife Rebecca (d.1747) at Delaware Bay is recorded quaintly in the family Bible. It was "Drawn from an old book he fetcht with him," and tells that they came "...to North a Merecay April 15th 1699[and the ship dropped]anker at Redy Island the same day...."(10) They had probably been invited by Rebecca's father, William Fisher, Esq. (d.1725), a man of property who held county office.

William Fisher represented Sussex in the Provincial Assembly of 1699 and again in 1708 when, with others, he withdrew to form a separate governing body for the "Three Lower Counties."<sup>(11)</sup> Fisher's eleven-hundred-acre plantation in Broadkilm Neck called "Dyer's Delight"<sup>(12)\*</sup> was to become the seat of his Conwell descendants for generations. This estate is referred to in the will of Rebecca (Fisher) Conwell Cornwallis, widow of William Cornwallis (d.1727/8), who died in 1747.<sup>†</sup> She bequeathed eight hundred acres of it to her son John Conwell and two hundred acres to her son Elias Conwell.<sup>(13)</sup>

Yeates and Rebecca (Fisher) Conwell had four children:

\* This land was named by a former proprietor, William Dyer, son of Mary Dyer, the Quaker martyr.

† William Cornwallis, alias Vandunk Riddledon, had lived at Gray's

I. William Conwell who married Sarah Smith and had sons Thomas (b.1727?), and Yeates (b.1729). Thomas, in turn, married Elizabeth and had three sons, William (b.1746), Thomas (b.1748),<sup>(14)</sup> and John(?)(b.1751). William and John, of this generation, are said to have sold their Delaware land about 1767 and removed to Fayette County, Pennsylvania, where they built a block-house on Dunlap's Creek known as Fort Conwell. The brothers are said to have taken part in the Revolution, William serving as a captain of Rangers on the frontier.<sup>(15)</sup>

II. John Conwell, of this line, married Comfort Claypoole, and Susannah Grove. Of them further.

III. Elias Conwell (d.1782) was married August 25, 1740 by "Parson Beckett" of the Church of England, to Rachel (1721-1767), daughter of Jeremiah and Sarah Claypoole.<sup>(16)</sup> Their children were:<sup>(17)</sup>

1. Jeremiah (b.1741).
2. John (1743-1768).<sup>(18)</sup>
3. George (b.1746).
4. Sarah (1748-1786) who married in 1769 William King (b.1745), and had issue.
5. Shepherd (1751-1765).
6. Rebecca (1754-1754).
7. Fisher (b.1756).

8. Jacob (1758-1759).
9. Elias (1760-1796).
10. David Claypoole (b.1766).

IV. Hannah Conwell married Abraham Gum and had  
issue.



John Conwell, Planter, of "Dyer's Delight"

At the time of his mother's death in 1747, John Conwell (Mar.1706-1782) resided at "Dyer's Delight," the family estate inherited from his maternal grandfather William Fisher, Esq. (d.1725). According to his own deposition, he was born early in March, 1706.<sup>(19)</sup> His marriage to Comfort (c.1717-d. after Jan.30,1759), daughter of Jeremiah and Sarah (Shepherd?) Claypoole, had taken place about 1735 or earlier. (Comfort's sister, Rachel, married Elias Conwell in 1740.)<sup>(20)</sup>

John Conwell lived in the comfortable style of a well-to-do planter, cultivating his ample fields with the aid of slave labor and a growing family of sons. He was well endowed with land, for aside from his eight-hundred-acre portion of "Dyer's Delight," his mother had left him another hundred, there had been a hundred acres from his Grandfather Fisher, and in 1740 he took up two hundred acres south of Prime Hook.<sup>(21)</sup>

When the French and Indian War broke out, his twenty-year-old son Elias enlisted May 11, 1759, as corporal in Captain Wright's Company of Militia.<sup>(22)</sup> Later Elias's brothers would serve in the Revolution.

Mrs. Comfort (Claypoole) Conwell died sometime after January 30, 1759, when, with the other heirs of her father, Jeremiah Claypoole, she sued her stepmother, Mary (then Mrs. Thomas Humphreys), who was executrix of Claypoole's estate. (23)

John Conwell married on June 29, 1779, Susanna Grove. (24)

He was "Aged and Infirm of Body but of Sound Memory and Judgment..." when he executed his will April 24, 1782 (proved July 22, 1782). After providing for his beloved wife Susanna with stock, furniture, a riding horse, the joint use of his personal estate with a grandson, and half the rents from his "Manner Plantation," he gave the residue of his property to his children.

His son John Conwell (II) inherited that part of the land whereon he dwelt, with the houses and improvements, certain other land, and half his bayside and landing marsh pasture, and the use of seventy acres of woodland.

To his grandson Abraham Conwell, son of his deceased son William, he left the remaining part of his manor plantation, and the residue of the land and marsh from the line of John Conwell, Jr. If Abraham Conwell died without heirs this land was to revert to John Conwell (66), the son of John Conwell, <sup>and his heirs</sup> forever.

^

He willed cash legacies to his grandchildren, Jacob, Rachel, Alice and Rebecca Conwell, children of his deceased son Joseph Conwell.

His daughter Lidda, wife of Thomas Coulter, who had doubtless received her portion at marriage, received 40 shillings; and his granddaughter, Hannah Conwell, inherited four acres of a 111-acre survey made for his son John Conwell.

He willed his part of a brandy still, shared with his brother Elias, to his son John, who was to allow its use to the testator's wife, and grandson, Abraham Conwell, "for the stilling the Lickqor of the produce of their own Orchard." He also gave his son John a large chest made by Stephen Revel.

He named his wife, Susanna, and grandson, Abraham Conwell, executors. (25)

The inventory of his personal estate, appraised in September 1782, included eight Negro slaves: a woman Sidney, age twenty-five, and child, at £ 75; two nine-year-old boys, at £ 90; two girls, at £ 40; Sarah, age twelve, £ 50; and Tom, age fifty, of no value at all. He grew wheat, corn and flax. There was a large "Family bible & Prayer Book with pilgrims progress." The whole <sup>personal estate</sup> totaled £ 574-1. (26)

Susanna, his widow, died prior to March 22, 1787, when her administrator, Thomas Grove, gave bond with William Walton.(27)

Issue of John and Comfort (Claypoole) Conwell:

I. Colonel William Conwell (c.1736-1782) seems to have been the intellectual of the family. The books in his library included volumes of "Burns Justice," "Universal History," "Young's Night Thoughts," "Sacred History," "Whilby's Paraphrase on New Testament," "Jure Divins, a satyr," "Sims's Military Guide," and a large "Church of England" family Bible. William Conwell was commissioned lieutenant-colonel of the Third Regiment of Delaware militia August 31, 1778.(28) His other belongings included a silver mounted "Dirgh"(dirk), a pair of holsters and pistol, two muskets and a bayonet. He had a riding carriage and eleven Negro slaves.(29)

At the time of his death in 1782 his wife was named Sarah, and the children, named in his will (dated Feb. 7, 1782, proved Mar. 1, 1782), were Abraham, George, William, Comfort (Mrs. Cord Hazzard), (there was a David Hazzard of this family who was Governor of Delaware), Deborah, Rebecca, and Anna Conwell.(30)

II. Elias Conwell, born in 1738,<sup>(31)</sup> who served as a corporal in the French and Indian War. He evidently predeceased his father without issue.

III. Joseph Conwell, evidently a twin, was born in 1738. He married and left issue named in his father's will. He also predeceased his father.

IV. Lidda Conwell who married Thomas Coulter.

V. John Conwell (c.1742-1811), married Betty (Waller?) and had issue. Of them further.

John Conwell, Junior, of "Dyer's Delight"

John Conwell (ca. 1742-1811) grew up on his father's plantation "Dyer's Delight" in Broadkilm Neck where he learned farming. After his marriage, about 1765 to Betty (Waller?), he settled on part of his father's manor plantation. This he inherited with its woodland, and bay-side and landing marsh pasture.

It is likely he was identical with the John Conwell named lieutenant-colonel in Sussex County September 16, 1775. (32)

John Conwell executed his will August 21, 1811 (proved Sept. 16, 1811) in which he gave a third of his land and marsh to his wife Betty, including the buildings where they lived, for life, also a horse and carriage, and other personal estate.

He mentioned his daughters, the children of his deceased son Charles who had married Sally Bell, and sons John, George, William and Jeremiah. The latter four inherited the remaining two-thirds of his land, and at his wife's death the third <sup>she held.</sup> His beloved wife, Betty, was named executrix. (33)

Betty (Waller?) Conwell died in 1815, when her sons, John Conwell "66", and George Conwell, "of John,"

gave bond as administrators of her estate.<sup>(34)</sup> The estate of John Conwell II had been settled by John Conwell 66, as "agent for Elizabeth Conwell."<sup>(35)</sup>

Children of John Conwell named in his will:

I. Mary Conwell who married Augustus Miller, and died before her father, leaving issue.

II. John Conwell 66 (1766-1840) who married Sarah (Clark?) and had issue. Of them further.

III. Charles Conwell, son of John and "Betsy Conwell," was baptized at Cool Spring Presbyterian Church June 11, 1769.<sup>(36)</sup> He married Sally Bell, and predeceased his father, leaving issue.

IV. Betsy Conwell, the daughter of John and "Betty Conwell," was baptized at her parents' house at Broadkilm February 31, 1773.<sup>(37)</sup>

V. George Conwell, "son of John," was baptized May, 1774.<sup>(38)</sup>

VI. Deborah Conwell married John Rowland.

VII. William Conwell.

VIII. Jeremiah Conwell.

IX. Sarah Conwell, unmarried when her father executed his will.

John Conwell 66 of "Dyer's Delight"

John Conwell (1766-1840), according to a firmly rooted family tradition, was born in 1766 and evidently adopted this unusual suffix to distinguish himself from numerous cousins and nephews with the same name.

He married, about 1787, Sarah, whose maiden name, traditionally, was Clark. John Conwell 66 was a farmer, and resided on his portion of the ancestral estate.

He died intestate February 20 (or 23), 1840, and letters of administration on his estate were granted to his widow, Sarah, who died the following year.<sup>(39)</sup> From an "Obituary Book 1826-1849," found at Lewes, the death of "66-John Conwell" on February 23, 1840, age 74 (p.31), supports the family tradition. This book also records the death of John Conwell's wife, with no first name, January 31, 1841, at the age of seventy (p.32).<sup>(40)</sup>

In the guardian account of David Conwell, filed by Asa Conwell in February, 1858, is a cash item for the deceased's share of land purchased by James G. Robbins from the heirs of John Conwell "of Sixty Six."<sup>(41)</sup> This same James G. Robbins petitioned the Orphans' Court at Georgetown, Delaware, March 9, 1841, for the valuation of the lands of John Conwell 66 who died intestate on or about



February 20, 1840, leaving a widow, Sarah Conwell, since deceased, and the following children: (42)

- I. Charles Conwell.
- II. William Conwell.
- III. Asa Conwell.
- IV. Henry Conwell.
- V. David Conwell, who died prior to February, 1858.
- VI. Asbury Conwell.
- VII. Ann Conwell, who married Eli Messick.
- VIII. Louisa Conwell who married William B. Shockley.  
Of them further.
- IX. Mary Conwell, deceased by Mar. 9, 1841.
- X. Elizabeth Conwell, deceased by Mar. 9, 1841.

Louisa Conwell (Mrs. William B. Shockley)

"Louisa Conwell the daughter of John Conwell and Sarah his wife was born Jan 1st 1806."<sup>(43)</sup> She was married, by bond dated January 27, 1825, in Sussex County, Delaware, to William B. Shockley.<sup>(44)</sup>

William B. Shockley, with his wife and young children, left Sussex County between May 20, 1827 and October 1, 1828, as their family Bible shows that their daughter Sarah Ann was born in Sussex and their son Elisha H. was born in Ohio.

On November 26, 1841, Eli S. Messick and his wife, Ann, late Ann Conwell, one of the daughters of John Conwell, deceased, and William B. Shockley and wife Louisa, late Conwell, one of the daughters of John Conwell 66, deceased, all of Henry County, Indiana, gave power of attorney to William Hazzard of Sussex County, Delaware.<sup>(46)</sup>

William B. Shockley was for many years a practicing physician in Henry County, Indiana, and died February 6, 1876. His wife, Louisa (Conwell) Shockley, died May 31, 1873.<sup>(47)</sup>

Children of Dr. William B. Shockley and Louisa (Conwell) Shockley, recorded in the family Bible:<sup>(48)</sup>

I. William C. was born November 5, 1825, in Sussex County, Delaware.

II. Sarah Ann was born May 20, 1827, in Sussex County. She died January 14, 1842.

III. Elisha H. was born October 1, 1828, in Muskingdom County, Ohio.

IV. David C. was born September 18, 1831, in Muskingdom County, Ohio. He died September 24, 1832, at the same place.

V. Elizabeth B. was born November 1, 1833, in Lickin County, Ohio. She died January 15, 1842.

VI. Emoline C. was born April 5, 1835, in Lickin County, Ohio. She married - - Rinard, and they were the grandparents of Mrs. Charles R. Barefoot, of Toledo, Ohio.

VII. Louisa J. was born January 15, 1837, in Lickin County, Ohio.

VIII. John W. was born April 29, 1839, in Henry County, Indiana.

IX. Benjamin F. was born April 12, 1841, in Henry County, Indiana. He died December 26, 1864.

X. Mary A. was born April 5, 1843.

XI. Asa C. was born May 6, 1845.

XII. Sarah C. was born March 28, 1848.

XIII. Nancy E. was born August 28, 1850, in Henry County, Indiana.

XIV. Harriet Francena was born October 18, 1853. She married Mr. Bales, and was living in Hartford City,

Indiana, when she sent a copy of the Shockley Bible records to her niece, Mrs. Barefoot, September 2, 1921. (The letter and records are owned by Mr. Charles R. Barefoot, 1959.)

[ Katherine Thomas  
d/o Sarah Rivard

- (1) Jennings Cropper Wise, Ye Kingdome of Accawmacke on the Eastern Shore of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century (Richmond, Virginia, 1911), 1,38,39.
- (2) J. Thomas Scharf, History of Delaware 1609-1888 (Philadelphia, 1888), II, 1200, 1203, 1205, 1221.
- (3) "Minutes of Philadelphia Monthly Meeting," Publications of the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania, II (June, 1900), 121.
- (4) Pennsylvania Archives, Second Series, IX, 661,664; C.H.B.Turner, Some Records of Sussex County Delaware (Philadelphia, 1909), 24,112.
- (5) Publications of the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania, II, 134; Turner, Some Records of Sussex County Delaware, 16.
- (6) "Wills Administrations Marriages - Kent & Sussex Counties Delaware 1683-1695," p.135 (Collections of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Photostatic copy at the Hall of Records, Dover.)
- (7) Court Records Sussex County 1680-1699, 435, Hall of Records, Dover.
- (8) Turner, Some Records of Sussex County Delaware, 130,132.

- (9) T.C.Conwell, in "The Conwell Family" (typed copy at Hall of Records, Dover), quotes that Yeates was the son of Francis Cornwall. (Winifred Conwell Milne's The Murray-Conwell Genealogy and Allied Families, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1938). The references for this connection however do not seem to bear out the statement.
- (10) C.H.B.Turner, "Genealogical Gleanings From Family Bibles," Publications of the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania, III (Jan., 1906), 273.
- (11) Pennsylvania Archives, Second Series, IX, 699; Turner, Some Records of Sussex County Delaware, 45.
- (12) Delaware Land Records, F<sup>2</sup> #11, Hall of Records, Dover (Resurvey, 27 da. 11 mo. 1701, 1100 acres for William Fisher which he purchased from Francis Chadsey, executor of James Stanfield. It had formerly belonged to William Dyer.)
- (13) The will of William Fisher, Esq., dated Dec. 10, 1725; proved Dec. 22, 1725, names his wife Rebecca; children Elias Fisher and Rebecca Conwell, and grandchildren William, Hannah, John, and Elias Conwell, A 71, p.159, Hall of Records, Dover. The will of William Cornwallis, executed Mar. 24, 1727; proved Apr. 9, 1728, names his

wife Rebecca, and mentions her offspring by Yeates Conwell. He names his daughter-in-law (step-daughter), Hannah Conwell, and sons-in-law (step-sons), John and William Conwell, A 66, 227, Hall of Records, Dover. The will of Rebecca Cornwallis, dated Oct. 7, 1745; proved Apr. 20, 1747, bequeaths the 800-acre plantation he lived on to her son John Conwell, being the land that formerly belonged to her deceased father Wm. Fisher called Dyer's Delight, also 100 acres more that had been her father's. She willed 200 acres of Dyer's Delight to her son Elias Conwell, and cash to her daughter Hannah Gum, and grandchildren, Thomas and Yeates Conwell. Her sons John and Elias Conwell were named executors, A 66, 226, Hall of Records, Dover.

- (14) C.H.B. Turner, "Genealogical Gleanings From Family Bibles," Publications of the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania, III, 271, 272.
- (15) The Vineland Historical Magazine, III, 50.
- (16) Publications of the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania, III, 273.
- (17) Ibid, 272, 273, 274.
- (18) Sussex, Delaware, inventories, Hall of Records, Dover  
(John Conwell, Junior, for whom Elias Conwell was

administrator, Nov. 29, 1768, included a horse and saddle, £ 8, and 1/2 of a schooner, £ 90. The total was £ 113-16.)

- (19) Sussex, Delaware, deeds, H-8, p. 97 (Courtesy of Mrs. David Anthony Potter.)
- (20) Sussex, Delaware, chancery records, C #25 (George Claypoole, administrator of John Claypoole, dec'd, vs. Thomas Humphreys and wife. This case tells that Jeremiah Claypoole left the following heirs, Comfort, wife of John "Conner [sic]," Mary, wife of William Fowler, Sarah, wife of Jacob Gum, Rachel, wife of Elias "Conner [sic]," Elizabeth, wife of Lewis Davidson, George and John Claypoole, who were living at the time, Jan. 30, 1759.)
- (21) Delaware Land Records, Sussex Co., C<sup>2</sup> #37, Hall of Records, Dover.
- (22) Delaware Archives, I, 25.
- (23) Sussex, Delaware, chancery records C #25, op.cit., Hall of Records, Dover.
- (24) "Records of United Presbyterian Churches of Lewes, Indian River and Cool Spring, Delaware, 1756-1855," 294, Collections of The Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania (hereafter C.G.S.P.)



- (25) Delaware wills, A 66, 116, Hall of Records, Dover.
- (26) Sussex, Delaware, inventories, Hall of Records, Dover.
- (27) Sussex, Delaware, testamentary bonds, Hall of Records, Dover.
- (28) Delaware Archives, III, 1248.
- (29) Sussex, Delaware, inventories, Hall of Records, Dover  
(Dated Mar. 5, 1782, total personal estate, £ 925-6-5-1/2.)
- (30) "Abstracts of Sussex County Delaware Wills," I, 79,  
C.G.S.P.
- (31) C.H.B.Turner, under Conwell, p.272, from the Dorman  
Bible dated 1712, C.G.S.P. (Elias and Joseph, sons  
of John Conwell and Comfort his wife, b.1738.4 and  
1738.2).
- (32) Delaware Archives, III, 1235.
- × (33) Delaware wills, A 66, 117, Hall of Records, Dover.
- × (34) Sussex, Delaware, testamentary bonds, Hall of Records,  
Dover.
- (35) Delaware wills, A 66, 118, 119, Hall of Records, Dover.
- (36) "Records of United Presbyterian Churches of Lewes,  
Indian River and Cool Spring Delaware 1756-1855,"  
p.356, C.G.S.P.

- (37) Ibid., p.367, C.G.S.P.
- (38) Ibid., p. 370.
- ✓(39) Delaware wills and administrations, A 66, pp. 131, 132,137.
- ✓(40) Hall of Records, Dover.
- ✓(41) Sussex guardian accounts, Hall of Records, Dover.
- ✓(42) Georgetown, Delaware, vol. S, p.414.
- ✓(43) Records from William B. Shockley's Bible, copied by his daughter Mrs. Harriet Bales of Hartford City, Indiana, for Mrs. Charles R. Barefoot Sept. 2, 1921 (Photostat filed at The Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania.)
- ✓(44) Delaware Marriages, vol. 41, p.257, Hall of Records, Dover.
- (45) Footnote 43.
- (46) Sussex, Delaware, deeds, vol. 50, p.278, Georgetown, Delaware.
- (47) Letter from Charles R. Barefoot, dated Nov. 22, 1958, to George V. Massey II.
- (48) Copy from Charles R. Barefoot.